

### Waterways in North East India

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*The Declaration of additional 19 waterways in the North East by the Ministry of Shipping will give a window to the Central Government to plan well and be able to use the rivers in an integrated manner for efficient transportation of goods and humans throughout the North East*

**T**he concept of using the waterways in India is not new. From the times of Akbar, waterways have been used for transporting men and material in the Yamuna and Ganga. Later, during the British rule, several waterways were developed in India and many rivers continued to be used as waterways. But after Independence, the emphasis grew on rail and road sector and as a result, the waterways transportation shrunk. In spite of approximately 14,500 kilometers of waterways available, hardly 4500 kilometers were declared as National Waterways till last year. Now, the Government has taken a very aggressive approach towards inland water transportation and declared 106 additional waterways as National Waterways, taking the number to 111 from the existing 5. Of this, 19 rivers are in the North Eastern India. (See Box 1.)

These newly declared National Waterways in the North East will definitely provide a viable alternative and additional support to the transportation logistics of this area.

The navigational potential of the waterways in the North East India is yet to be optimally tapped. The National Waterway 2 (NW2), which is

the 891 Kilometer long portion of the Brahmaputra river starting from Dhubri (near Bangla Desh border) to Sadiya, has always had a great potential, but there has been no comprehensive development of the mighty Brahmaputra as a waterway on which cargo and humans can move safely and regularly. The upper reaches of Brahmaputra near Passighat have a regular flow of traffic on the waterway, but limited by kind, capacity and number of the barges and boats available. The Army also uses the waterway in that section for transporting their vehicles across the river. The starting point of Waterway 2 at Dhubri was a port of some repute in the early parts of the century, but was not maintained. There is a big volume of fish and vegetables that moves in this area, both to cater to the internal demand and that from Bangladesh. (See Box 2.)

#### **The Indo Bangladesh Protocol Route:**

The planners, with all their good intentions, connected NW2 to NW1 (Hooghly/Ganges) over the Indo Bangladesh Protocol Route, through Bangladesh. But the cross border issues, sailing through Bangladesh, lack of development of the waterway through Bangladesh, lack of availability of draft (technically called the Least Available Depth) through out the length

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Box-1		
State	No. of rivers / canal	Name of the River / Canal
Arunachal Pradesh	1	Lohit
Assam	14	Aai, Barak, Beki, Dhansiri / Chathe, Dehing, Dikhu, Doyans, Gangadhar, Jinjiram, Kopili, <u>Lohit</u> , Puthimari, Subansiri and <u>Tlwang (Dhaleswari)</u>
Meghalaya	5	GANOL, JINJIRAM, KYN Shi, SIMSANG and UMNGOT (DAWKI)
Mizoram	1	Tlwang (Dhaleswari)
Nagaland	1	Tizu - Zungki
	19	

Note: Lohit, Jinjiram and Tlwang are in more than one States of NE. Hence, 19 rivers in NE.

Note: Gangadhar is in Assam and West Bengal.

of the Protocol Route (in Bangladesh over the river Padma) prevented it from being a viable alternative. Infact, the transportation of wheat and rice in the Public Distribution System (that is for the Fair Price Shops/ Ration Shops) in the North East could (and should) be taken over the Protocol Route, saving millions of rupees in transportation and saving the congestion on roads. The Food Corporation of India, never took this initiative, or even if they did, never succeeded in using this cheaper mode of transportation to carry food-grains across to the North East. (See Box 3.)

The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), has been planning and building infrastructure on the NW2, but has a long way to go. The jetty being

constructed with a railway siding at Pandu is ready, but there is not enough

cargo movement yet. The IWAI has almost completed a RoRo (Roll-on, Roll-off) jetty at Dhubri, but the jetty on the other bank at Hatsingmari has some technical problems due to large scale erosion of the embankment.

The other part of the transportation through the protocol route towards Karimganj and Ashuganj has remained embroiled in controversy on one account or the other.

The Declaration of additional 19 waterways in the North East by the Ministry of Shipping will give a window to the Central Government to plan well and be able to use the rivers in an integrated manner for efficient transportation of goods and humans throughout the North East.

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Box-2

## National Waterway-2

### The Brahmaputra

Sadiya - Dhubri (Bangladesh Border) - 891 km



Box-3

